—Washington Star Photographer Geoffrey Gilbert

Joe Boulder displays letters to Lee Harvey Oswald which he purchased.

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Collector Keeps Letters Sealed

An Oswald Mystery for $130

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By John Sherwood
Washington Star Staff Writer

In 1965, Joseph C. Boulder of Ellicott City, Md., "bought a mystery."

The so-called mystery was — and still is — two unopened letters dated 1960 and written to Lee Harvey Oswald "care of the Hotel Metropole, Russia" by his mother in Fort Worth, Tex.

To this day, the letters allegedly remain sealed.

Returned to Marguerite Oswald, each letter bore Russian postmarks over the envelope flaps, along with a "Retour-Parti" sticker.

IN SEPTEMBER 1965, these mystery letters and other Oswald-type memorabilia and correspondence were auctioned in New York for Oswald's mother by Charles Hamilton Autographs, Inc.

Boulder, 50, a Social Security analyst in Arlington, was bidding on one particular Oswald letter that eventually went for $3,000. "I promised my wife I would stop at $2,000," he says, "but I didn't stop until I reached $2,900."

As a sort of consolation prize, he successfully bid $130 for the two unopened letters described in the Hamilton brochure like this:

"Provocative relics of Oswald. Although each of these letters appears neither to have been opened, each bears the tiny pen-and-ink notation of the Warren Commission. Mrs. Oswald states that she has no recollection of what she wrote to her son, or what she discussed with him. If the Warren Commission opened and re-sealed them, they did so with extraordinary skill and without Mrs. Oswald's knowledge.

"What do these letters contain? That is something which will be revealed only when the highest bidder at auction opens them."

TO THIS DAY, however, Boulder does not know what they say.

"That's the whole thing about owning them," he says. "If I opened them, I might well be disappointed. However, then again I might not be."

Boulder, who does not look at all like a man concerned with mysteries, says he is a "nut over auctions" and has been stung before. Incredibly, he carried his mini-mystery a mini-step further.

He didn't even open Charles Hamilton's covering letter containing the letters to Oswald. They were sent to Hamilton almost ten years ago, in October 1965.

"As far as I was concerned, that added a little bit more to the mystery," Boulder says, trying to explain something that is very difficult to explain.

"I supposed the letters to Oswald were inside, but I didn't know for certain, did I?"

YESTERDAY, as the excitement level peaked, he was about to "know for certain." As a news photographer duly recorded the event, Boulder opened the unopened Hamilton letter and found the pair of unopened Oswald letters, along with the proper receipts from Hamilton.

A reporter held the mystery letters up to the light, and Boulder took on a stricken look. "I wouldn't dream of doing that," he said. "I hope you can't make out anything."

Rest easy, Boulder. You could not see through the light blue envelopes.

Now, for some questions:

When Oswald could not be located at the Hotel Metropole, and the March 2 and April 4 letters were returned to his mother, why did she decide to keep them? It was 1960, well before the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Why didn't she just throw them away?

And if the Warren Commission did open them, how did it get them, and what did they say? Boulder, who says he is no scholar and no J.F.K. assassination buff, says he bought them "purely as an investment. I can't answer any of your questions. I just don't know."

HE GRINNED, content that his investment of $130 was a sound one.

"I have no plans whatever to open them," he added. "I've kept them sealed for 10 years. I can wait 10 more. It's the only mystery I own. If I open them, the mystery is ended."

Boulder carefully put them back in the yellow Charles Hamilton envelope and returned to work analyzing Social Security information for the Bureau of Hearings and Appeals.

And so — in this era of awakened interest in the truth about Lee Harvey Oswald — the incredible mystery lives on, incredibly.